

Ads aim to discourage teens from trying meth

by Walter C. Jones, Morris News Service

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ATLANTA -- Teens can expect to see and hear some graphic ads soon to show them the creepy side of drug use in an effort to discourage them from ever trying methamphetamine.

Monday, the Georgia Meth Project unveiled a series of advertisements that will appear on billboards, prime-time television shows and radio. Some feature former addicts recounting their experiences. Others show actors portraying the violence, paranoia and mental problems that often result from prolonged meth abuse.

Surveys show that teens need education about the dangers of the drug. More than one in three see little risk of trying it, according to a poll by GfK Roper Public Affairs & Media. A quarter see no risk in using the drug regularly, and one-fifth say it will help with weight loss.

According to the poll, 39 percent of teens say their friends would not "give them a hard time" if they used meth.

"Today, Georgia is taking a stand," said Attorney General Thurbert Baker. "We are taking a stand because it's wrecking a toll."

That toll is \$1.3 billion annually in health care, social services, law enforcement and prisons, he said, quoting a recent study by the Rand Corporation. Georgia has 3,100 inmates due to meth-related crimes, and 9,100 people on probation.

Baker, the state's top law enforcement official, said cops can arrest suppliers all day long, but the solution is halting demand for the drug. That demand has grown so great that most supplies no longer come from kitchens in dealer's homes but from Mexican drug cartels' factories.

Baker, a Democrat who is running for governor, was joined by U.S. Sen. Johnny Isakson, a Republican who's running for re-election this year.

Isakson helped get federal funding to supplement the private donations paying for the ads. The goal is for 80 percent of Georgia teens to see at least four ads per week.

A similar campaign three years ago in Montana helped reduce teen use of meth by 63 percent and push down meth-related crimes by about the same amount, Isakson said.

"Georgia's youth are being robbed by methamphetamine. Georgia's future is being robbed by meth," he said. "I hope in two or three years, we'll say that Georgia's meth problem has reduced 63 percent, too."